

Thackeray's Comment on the Social Aspect of Art, Politics and Religion

by Lydia A. Lindsey

June, 1913

Submitted to the Department of English of the
University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the
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Thackeray's Comment on the Social Aspect of Art, Politics
and Religion.

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individual, and it is as a master of character that he excels. He, himself, belonged to the upper middle class, and it is to this class that most of his characters belong. Each novel is taken up with the development of a character or characters from childhood to manhood or womanhood. The problem Thackeray sets for himself is to see how their development is helped or hindered by the organized form of society in which they live. The family life is recognized as of paramount importance, and closely associated with it is the religion taught by the parents and by the church; then comes the life at school, where the character comes into contact with companions from various homes of varying ideals; and last the entrance into the society of the world, which still has a large part to play in shaping the life of the young man or young woman into its final mold.

Thackeray sheds little light upon the industrial conditions or business life of England. "All authors can do"¹, he says, "is to depict men out of their business -- in their passions, loves, laughters, amusements, hatreds, and what not -- and describe these as well as they can, taking the business part for granted.

1. V. F. p. 489.

Thus in talking of the present or past world, I know I am only dangle about the theater-lobbies, coffee-houses, ridottas, pleasure-haunts, fair-booths, and feasting and fiddling rooms of life". Thackeray claims to make but a single exception - that of war. "When he (the novelist)₁ is speaking of the profession of arms, in which men can show courage or the reverse, and in treating of which the writer naturally has to deal with interesting circumstances, actions and characters, introducing recitals of danger, devotedness, heroic deaths, and the like, the novelist may perhaps venture to deal with the actual affairs of life".

There is one profession, however, which Thackeray considers interesting enough to treat at some length. This is, not unnaturally, the one which he personally liked and knew best, the profession of art in its broadest sense. In "Pendennis", "The Virginians" and "Philip", we are frequently admitted to the sanctum sanctorum of the writer, while in "The Newcomers" we learn something of the painter and how he was regarded in English society. Ethel writes to her uncle in India₂, "You will order Clive not to sell his pictures, won't

1. Va. . p. 489.
2. New. p. 286.

crosses, for an ambassador, I believe, till the Queen called him Monsieur Delaroche. She says there is no knowing people in this country!

The reader is frequently admitted to the studios of Clive and his artist friends, and permitted to watch them at work. In "Philip", where we meet again with Mr. J. J. Ridley, the talented lad who studied with Clive and excelled him, and who is now a Royal Academician, Thackeray gives us his own opinion on art₁. "To be a painter and to have your hand in perfect command, I hold to be one of life's summa bona. The happy mixture of hand and head work, must render the occupation supremely pleasant. In the day's work must occur endless delightful difficulties and occasions for skill. Each day there must occur critical moments of supreme struggle and triumph. There is the excitement of the game, and the gallant delight in winning it. Of this sort of admirable reward for their labor, no men, I think, have a greater share than painters (perhaps a violin player perfectly and triumphantly performing his own beautiful composition may be equally happy.) Here is occupation: here is excitement: here is struggle and victory: and here is profit. Dukes and Rothchilds may be envious of such a man. She (art) is

1. Ph. p. 159.

always true; always new: always the friend, companion, inestimable consoler. I have seen no men in life loving their profession so much as painters, except perhaps actors, who when not engaged themselves, always go to the play".

If the painter, as such, was looked down upon by English society, the same was not true of the writer. Pendennis at first was only a "hack", as George Warrington was sure to remind him when the lad showed too much self-conceit, but yet he was not looked down on in that society in which his uncle, the Major, had made it the chief ambition of his life to move. It is true that Major Pendennis himself₁ "Had thought Mr. Pen and his newspaper connections quite below his dignity as a major and a gentleman. But when the oracular Wenham praised the boy's production; when Lord Falconet -- approved of the genius of young Pen; when the great Lord Steyne himself -- laughed and sniggered over it and swore it was capital,-- the Major, as in duty bound, began to admire his nephew very much." Pen became "known both in literary and polite circles₂. Amongst the former his fashionable reputation stood him in no little stead; he was considered to be a gentleman of good present means and better

1. Pen. p. 340.

2. Pen. p. 340.

expectations, who wrote for his pleasure, than which there cannot be a greater recommendation for a young literary aspirant." He was invited everywhere to all the great houses," and was as much at home at Mayfair dining tables₁ as at those tavern boards where some of his companions of the pen were accustomed to assemble."

Although Thackeray considered private business too dull for a novelist to chronicle, he evidently did not have the same opinion of politics. "Henry Esmond" is largely taken up with the struggles between the Whigs and the Tories, between the supporters of the Protestant rulers of England and those of the exiled House of Stuart. Thackeray is unsparing in his ridicule of the exaggerated homage paid to kings and nobility because of their position. He has no sympathy with the doctrine of the "Divine Right of Kings".

For William of Orange₂, though, he has only praise. Mr. Esmond's commission was scarce three weeks old, he writes, when that accident befel King William which ended the life of the greatest, the wisest, the bravest, and most clement sovereign whom England ever knew. 'Twas the fashion of the hostile party to assail this great prince's reputation during his life; but the

1. Pen. p. 340.
2. Esmond P. 158.

joy which they and all his enemies in Europe showed at his death is a proof of the terror in which they hold him." In another place he says,¹ "There were designs against King William that were no more honorable than the ambushes of cutthroats and footpads. 'Tis humiliating to think that a great Prince, possessor of a great and sacred right, and upholder of a great cause, should have stooped to such baseness of assassination and treason as are proved by the unfortunate King James's own warrant and sign manual given to his supporters in this country. The noble Prince of Orange burst magnanimously through these feeble meshes of conspiracy." In comparing the young Prince James the Third to King William he says,² "Indeed the fight was not fair between the two. 'Twas a weak, priest-ridden, woman-ridden man, with such puny allies and weapons as his own poor nature led him to choose, contending against the schemes, the generalship, the wisdom, and the heart of the hero." Of England's regard for kings he writes;³ "Ours is the most loyal people in the world, surely; we admire our kings, and are faithful to them long after they have ceased to be true to us. 'Tis a wonder to anyone who looks back at

1. Esmond p. 162.
2. Esmond p. 163.
3. Esmond p. 160.

the history of the Stuart family, to think how they kicked their crowns away from them; how they flung away chances after chances; what treasures of loyalty they dissipated, and how fatally they were bent on consummating their own ruin. If ever men had fidelity, 'twas they; if ever men squandered opportunity, 'twas they; and of all the enemies they had, they themselves were the most fatal." At the time of Esmond, kings were regarded by many as half divine. The old Dowager Lady₁ " had tokens from the Queen, and relics of the saint who, if the story was true, had not always been a saint as far as she and many others were concerned. She believed in the miracles wrought at his tomb, and had a hundred authentic stories of wondrous cures effected by the blessed king's rosaries, the medals which he wore, the locks of his hair, or what not? Lady Castlewood and Beatrix did not believe these stories, but when they were preparing the rooms in their house to receive Prince James, they knelt down at the bedside and kissed the sheets, "out of respect for the web that was to hold the sacred person of a King₂. Lady Castlewood made a curtsy at the door, as she would have done to the altar on entering a church, and owned that she considered the chamber in a manner sacred."

1. Esmond p. 159.
2. Esmond p. 353-354.

Thackeray's own opinion of this regard paid to unworthy men because they are kings is expressed in his favorite sarcastic vein in "Vanity Fair, where Becky is presented at court. "If she did not wish to lead a virtuous life,¹ at least she desired to enjoy a character for virtue, and we know that no lady in the genteel world can possess this desideratum until she has put on a train and feathers, and has been presented to her Sovereign at Court. From that august interview they come out stamped as honest women. The Lord Chamberlain gives them a certificate of virtue. -- But when we consider, that it was the First Gentleman of Europe in whose high presence Mrs. Rawdon passed her examination, and as it were, took her degree in reputation, it surely must be flat disloyalty to doubt any more about her virtue. I, for my part, look back with love and awe to that Great Character in history. Ah, what a high and noble appreciation of Gentlewomanhood there must have been in Vanity Fair, when that revered and august being was invested, by the universal acclaim of the refined and educated portion of this empire, with the title of PremierGentilhomme of his Kingdom". And then follows the description of how Thackeray himself as a schoolboy saw the King at the Drury Lane Theater. "THE KING".

1. V. F. p. 461.
2. V. F. p. 462.

There he was. Beef-eaters were before the august box; the Marquis of Steyne (Lord of the Powder Closet) and other great officers of state were behind the chair on which he sate. He sate -- florid of face, portly of person, covered with orders, and in a rich curling head of hair. - How we sang God save him! How the house rocked and shouted with that magnificent music. Yes, we saw him. Fate cannot deprive us of that. Others have seen Napoleon. Some few still exist who have beheld Frederick the Great, Doctor Johnson, Marie Antoinette, etc.- be it our reasonable boast to our childred, that we saw George the Good, the Magnificent, the Great." In Pendennis, Thackeray sums up his description of the despicable Sir Francis Clavering with, "Had he been a Crown Prince, he could not have been more weak₁, useless, dissolute or ungrateful".

The subject of politics in its relation to Parliamentary elections is treated somewhat at length in "The Newcomes", where the Colonel runs against Barnes for the office of representative in Parliament from Newcome, their ancestral town. One of the persons who were working against Barnes Newcome's election was a personal enemy, a factory man, whose principles and ability together with those of his class, Thackeray compliments." He had a good

cause₁, and was in truth a far better master of debate than our banking friend (Barnes), being a great speaker among his brother operatives, by whom political questions are discussed, and the conduct of political men examined, with a ceaseless interest and with an ardour and eloquence which are often unknown in what is called superior society"

In this election the Colonel received second place, instead of Barnes, not on account of his competency, but because of his noble character, which shone all the brighter against the blackness of Barnes's immorality and meanness. George Warrington, a very warm and efficient partisan, said of the Colonel's fitness to be a member of Parliament₂, "He known no more about politics than I do about dancing the polka: but there are five hundred wise-acres in that assembly who know no more than he does, and an honest man taking his seat there, in place of that confounded little rogue, at least makes a change for the better."

Clive after listening to one or two of his father's rambling and contradictory speeches, remarked with a sigh to Pendennis, "His politics are all sentiment and kindness₃, he will have the poor man paid double wages, and does not

1. New. p. 710.
2. New. p. 695.
3. New. p. 696.

remember that the employer would be ruined. When he comes armed cap - a - pie, and careers against windmills in public, don't you see that as Don Quixote's son I had rather the dear brave old gentleman was at home?" The Parliamentary election which is controlled by the "Great House" is described in "Philip", the successful candidate being "Mr. Grenville Woolcomb₁", who could not spell nor speak two sentences of decent English, and whose character for dulness, ferocity, penuriousness, jealousy, almost fatuity, was notorious to all the world."

Of Pendennis's one venture into politics we have the following account, which reminds us somewhat of American political methods₂: "Our ingenious friend had to ingratiate himself with the townspeople of Clavering, and with the voters of the borough, which he hoped to represent. Naturally rather reserved and silent in public, he became on a sudden -- frank, easy, and jovial. He laughed with everybody who would exchange a laugh with him, shook hands right and left, with what may be certainly called a dexterous cordiality; made his appearance at the market day and the farmers' ordinary, and, in fine, acted like a consummate hypocrite, and as gentlemen of the highest birth

1. Philip p. 632.
2. Pen. p. 641.

and most spotless integrity act when they wish to make themselves agreeable to their constituents, and have some end to gain of the country folks."

Had the ladies of the Castlewood family lived in the twentieth century, instead of the eighteenth, they no doubt would have headed the procession of the London suffragettes. The old Dowager₁ "was certainly as noisy a conspirator as ever asserted the King's rights, or abused his opponents, over a quadrille table or a dish of bohea,-- nor had the banished family any warmer supporter than that kind lady of Castlewood.-- She influenced her husband, very much more perhaps than my lord knew, who admired his wife prodigiously, though he might be inconstant to her, and who, adverse to the trouble of thinking himself, gladly enough adopted the opinions which she choose for him." Colonel Lambert in "The Virginians"₂ dismisses the politics of women with this opinion:- "As for the women, they are all for the Church. Every woman is a Tory at heart."

Thackeray sums up English politics as follows₃:-
"With people that take a side in politics, 'tis men rather than principles that commonly bind them. A kindness or a slight puts a man under one flag or the other, and he

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1. Esmond p. 159.
 2. Va. p. 186.
 3. Esmond p. 320.

marches with it to the end of the campaign.-- 'Tis strange to remember how the nation seemed to give itself up to the domination of one or the other aristocratic party, and took a Hanoverian king, or a French one, according as either prevailed. A strange series of compromises is that English History; compromise of principle, compromise of party, compromise of worship! The lovers of English Freedom and independence submitted their religious consciences to an Act of Parliament; could not consolidate their liberty without sending to Zell or The Hague for a king to live under; and could not find amongst the proudest people in the world a man speaking their own language, and understanding their laws, to govern them.-- In England, you can but belong to one party or t'other, and you take the house you live in with all its encumbrances, its retainers, its antique discomforts, and ruins even; you patch up, but you never build up anew."

More numerous than his comments on either art or politics, are Thackeray's references to religion, as expressed in the individual and in the church. In England, the church has always played a very important part in the history of the country and the lives of its people. An American who had spent a number of years among the English people out of their own country remarked in summing up their characteristics:- "The English are all Christians,

you know. They always go to church on Sunday." Thackeray, I think, would agree to the last part of the statement, but would laugh at it as a proof of true piety, or an upright life.

In Major Pendennis he gives us a typical picture of the conventional church-goer who goes to church because it is considered the proper thing to do. "No man went more regularly to church when in the country than the old bachelor¹. 'It doesn't matter so much in town, Pen', he said, 'for there the women go and the men are not missed. But when a gentleman is sur les terres, he must give an example to the country people, and if I could turn a tune, I even think I should sing. The Duke of St. David's, whom I have the honor of knowing, always sings in the country, and 'let me tell you, it has a doosid fine effect from the family pew' ". The delightful old worldling, as some one has called him, on the way to church entertained his nephew with the richest gossip about the fashionable world and urged upon him the advisability of marrying Blanche Amory, whose doubtful character the Major well knew, because she would bring a large dowry to her husband. "Arthur thought of the incongruity of their talk, perhaps₂; whilst the old gentleman was utterly unconscious of

1. Pen. p. 88.
2. Pen. p. 390.

any such contrast. His hat was brushed; his wig was trim; his neckcloth was perfectly tied. He looked at every soul in the congregation, it is true -- but so demurely, that he hardly lifted up his eyes from his book -- from his book which he could not read without glasses." Thackeray represents the Major abroad as having with him all the "elaborate necessaries of the English traveller₁ -- down to the old fellow's prayerbook, without which he never travelled, for he made a point of appearing at the English church at every place which he honored with a stay. 'Everybody did it', he said, 'every English gentleman did it', and this pious man would as soon have thought of not calling upon the English ambassador in a continental town, as of not showing himself at the national place of worship."

Thackeray, of a deeply religious nature himself, and with the greatest reverence for sincere religion, had no scorn too bitter for those who used it merely as a means of social or political advancement. Of the sudden repentance of Barnes Newcome, when that libertine and wife-beater wished to win votes for his election, he writes solemnly:- "Let us hope it was sincere₂. There is some hypocrisy of which one does not like even to entertain the thought; especially that awful falsehood which trades

1. Pen. p. 350.
2. New. p. 708.

with divine truth and takes the name of Heaven in vain." But he smiles and makes us smile with him in his last description of Becky Sharp in "Vanity Fair":- "Lady Crawley chiefly hangs about Bath and Cheltenham, where a very strong party of excellent people consider her to be a most injured woman. She has her enemies. Who has not? Her life is her answer to them. She busies herself in works of piety. She goes to church and never without a footman. Her name is in all the Charity Lists." The last mention we have of Becky is in "The Newcomes," where Clive speaks of "Lady Crawley, her who wrote the hymns ¹ just for the change and novelty it offered. After a fast, but disappointing London season, we find her in the country working "a most correct high-church-altar-cover" and making love to the clergyman₂, who for awhile thought her a saint, but later discovered her "precious gifts" were "mere tinsels₃." Of Rebecca's and Blanche's pretense of religion Thackeray always writes in a half humorous half sarcastic vein, but does not use them as a text for one of his lay sermons to the reader, as he does over and over again in the case of old Miss Crawley. "When she was in health and good spirits₄, he says, "this venerable inhabitant of Vanity Fair had as

1. New. p. 137.
2. Pen. p. 624.
3. Pen. 625.
4. V.F. p. 173.

free notions about morals and religion as Monsieur de Voltaire himself could desire, but when illness overtook her, it was aggravated by the most dreadful terrors of death, and an utter cowardice took possession of the prostrate old sinner." "Picture to yourself, oh fair young reader₁, a worldly, selfish, graceless, thankless, religionless old woman writhing in pain and fear, and without her wig. Picture her to yourself, and ere you be old, learn to love and pray."

In "Philip", where there is a description of how General Baynes storms at all his family and friends in order to drown the voice of his own conscience reproving him for the wrong he is plotting against his daughter, Thackeray ends the harangue with "Charles Baynes, thou old sinner, I pray that Heaven may turn thee to a better state of mind₂. I will kneel down by thy side, scatter ashes on my own bald pate, and we will quaver out our 'Peccavimus' together." In another place, in speaking on the same subject, he exclaims, "Ah, gracious Heaven gives us eyes to see our own wrong, however dim age may make them₃; and knees not too stiff to kneel in spite of years, cramp and rheumatism!" On his death-bed General Baynes "confessed

1. V.F. p. 124.
2. Philip p. 429.
3. Philip p. 446

his fault₁, though it is hard for those who expect love and reverence to have to own to wrong and to ask pardon. Old knees are stiff to bend: brother reader, young or old, when our last hour comes, may ours have grace to do so."

Although Thackeray intimates to us that in the English Church there are many inhabitants of Vanity Fair, who in their religion resemble the conventional church goer, Major Pendennis, and a number of others who like Rebecca and Blanche, use it as a passport to respectability, yet there are multitudes of others who, like Lady Jane Crawley, Helen and Laura Pendennis, General Lambert and Colonel Newcome, are sincere in their worship, and the Church to them is a holy place. In Pendennis he writes of Laura₂, "It was the custom of this young lady, to the utmost of her power, and by means of that gracious assistance which Heaven awarded to her pure and constant prayers, to do her duty -- the supplications which endowed her with the requisite strength for fulfilling it -- took place in her own chamber, away from all mortal sight." In "The Newcomes", where we meet Laura, the matron, he says₃:- "She had been bred to measure her actions by a standard, which the world may nominally admit, but which it leaves

1. Philip p. 467.
2. Pen. p. 489.
3. New. p. 530.

for the most part unheeded. Worship, love, duty, as taught her by the devout study of the Sacred Law which interprets and defines it -- if these formed the outward practice of her life, they were also its constant and secret endeavors and occupation. She spoke but seldom of her religion, though it filled her heart and influenced all her behavior. Compared to the possession of that priceless treasure and happiness unspeakable, a perfect faith, what has life to offer?" It is usually in women that Thackeray gives no such pictures of true Christians. But we hear his ideal English gentleman, Colonel Newcome, saying to his son,¹ 'We must go and ask Barnes Newcome's pardon, sir, and forgive other people's trespasses, my boy, if we hope forgiveness of our own.' And in the great closing scene of his life, where we find him as a Poor Brother in Grey Friars, he turns to his Bible and reads in all trust, "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him²." Pendennis, in whom I believe Thackeray shows his own religious beliefs, as he saw the old man bending over the volume, asks, "Who would not have humbled his own heart and breathed his inward prayer, confessing and adoring the Divine Will, which ordains these trials, these

1. New. p. 145.
2. New. p. 763.

triumphs, these humiliations, these blessed griefs, this crowning love?" It was the sound of church bells ringing that had helped Pendennis, when a young man, to conquer the greatest temptation of his life₁. Philip Firmin, with all his outside roughness, was deeply religious at heart. After the greatest crisis in his life, we see him at church with the "Little Sister" and his children₂. "And when the clergyman in the Thanksgiving particularized those who desire now to 'offer up their praises and thanksgiving for late mercies vouchsafed to them' Philip Firmin said 'Amen' on his knees and with all his heart."

Of such people then -- worldly Major Pendennises, wicked Becky Sharps, Blanche Amorys and Barnes Newcomes, quietly devout Helen and Laura Pendennises, Colonel Newcomes, and General Lamberts; and those others who were more tempted but who conquered their temptations by Divine help, the Arthur Pendennises, Clive Newcomes, and rough Philip Firmings - of such lay people Thackeray conceived the English church to be made up. Very many of them, if not the majority, we are to conclude, are earnest and sincere, trying to live their daily lives in the world according to the teachings of the Divine Teacher.

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1. Pen. p. 320.
 2. Philip p. 619.

In his clerical characters, Thackeray draws a dark picture of the English clergyman. In every novel except "Philip", a clergyman is more or less prominent, but with the exception of Dr. Portman and Reverend Smirke in "Pendennis", their characters are anything but admirable. Dr. Portman and Smirke are by no means perfect, but they are at least well meaning, humanly good, and devoted to their churches. In "The Virginians", we are introduced to Parson Sampson, who could preach eloquent sermons, but who spent his time outside the church in gambling, drinking, and leading young men into vice. In Bute Crawley we have the picture of the younger son who enters the Church for "the living", and who, without being vicious, was far from being good. In Esmond, Dr. Tusher, the chaplain at Castlewood, and his son Tom, who becomes a clergyman, both spend most of their time in toadying to the people of the "great house."

"When the Great Man is at home at the Castle, and walks over to the little country church in the Park, bringing the Duke, the Marquis and a couple of Cabinet Ministers with him, has it ever been your lot to sit in the congregation and watch Mr. Trotter the curate and his sermon₁? He looks anxiously at the Great Man's pew; he falters as he gives out his text, and thinks, "Ah, perhaps his Lordship may give me a living."

1. Va. p. 320.

Thackeray in reference to Henry Esmond intimates that he considers the calling of the ministry of the church to be something more than the mere choice of an occupation in life. "His patrons₁ had determined for him that he was to embrace the ecclesiastical life. But though his mistress's heart was in the calling, his own never was much. -- He made up his mind to assume the cassock and bands as another man does to wear a breast-plate and jack-boots, or to mount a merchant's desk, for a livelihood, and from obedience and necessity rather than from choice. There were scores of such men in Mr. Esmond's time at the Universities, who were going into the Church with no better calling than his."

Charles Honeyman presents the picture of a fashionable London clergyman of Thackeray's day. In character he is shallow, weak and dissolute. As Frederick Bayham said of him₂, "But Charley, sir, has such a propensity for humbug, that he will tell lies when there is no earthly good in lying." His private life will not bear inspection. Perhaps his worst fault is the dishonesty that arises from his being a spendthrift and a sponger. He is a "dandy" in dress and fond of high living. We are given a most laughable comparison between him and Saint Pedro₃

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1. Esmond p. 81.
 2. New. p. 259.
 3. New. p. 115.

of Alcantara. "I fancy the piano individual (Pedro) --- on his knees, or standing up in devout meditation, in the cupboard - his dwelling place, bareheaded and barefooted, walking over rocks, briars, mud, sharp stones (picking out the very worst places, let us trust, without his downcast eyes), under the bitter snow, or the drifting rain, or the scorching sunshine. I fancy Saint Pedro of Alcantara, and contrast him with the Incumbent of Lady Whittlesea's chapel, Mayfair. His cells consist of a refectory, a dormitory, and an adjacent oratory where he keeps his shower-bath and boots - the pretty boots trimly stretched on boot-trees and blacked to a nicety (not varnished) by the boy who waits on him. The barefooted business may suit superstitious ages and gentlemen of Alcantara, but does not become Mayfair and the nineteenth century." Charles preached very flowery sermons¹, to which the ladies about him contribute showers of sympathy. The men come away from his sermons and say, 'It's very pleasant, but I don't know what the deuce makes all you women crowd so to hear the man.'

It is only here and there that Thackeray lets fall a quiet word which shows that in spite of the depravity of the clergymen who figure most prominently in his novels, behind the scenes he believes there are many better men,

1. New. p. 116, 117.

such as Ethel Newcome found when she turned her efforts from the ballroom to helping the poor around her brother's home₁. "Here she met the priest upon his shift, the homely missionary bearing his words of consolation, the quiet curate pacing his rounds." Thackeray could not endure ostentation in religion. Churches that depended upon sensationalism, such as Lady Whittlesea's chapel, might draw a crowd for a little while, but such a crowd soon went off to some other church, which offered a newer sensation. "Meanwhile," he writes, "the good quiet old churches round about ring their accustomed bell, open their Sabbath gates, and receive their tranquil congregation and sober priest, who has been busy all the week, at schools and sick-beds, with watchful teaching, gentle counsel, and silent alms₂."

"Henry Esmond," covering the period of history it does, could scarcely escape from some comment on protestantism and Catholicism. We have already referred to the superstition of the Catholic church at that time, concerning the relics of King James II., which legends "the English High Church party did not adopt." Father Holt, a Jesuit, is Henry Esmond's childhood friend and teacher, and a prominent figure throughout the book. He is brave and clever, but

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1. New. p. 649.
 2. New. p. 256.

capable of employing any means, however dishonorable, to gain his ends. Of the Jesuits in general Thackeray writes¹, "The moral of the Jesuits' story I think as wholesome a one as ever was writ; the artfullest, the wisest, the most toilsome and dexterous plot-builders in the world - there always comes a day when the roused public indignation kicks their flimsy edifice down, and sends its cowardly enemies a-flying." When Henry Esmond lay wounded at Mons, Father Holt, finding that his pupil had forgotten the teaching of his childhood, attempted to regain his allegiance for the Church of Rome². "But Mr. Esmond said that his church was the church of his country, and to that he choose to remain faithful. But if the good Father meant that Esmond should join the Roman communion for fear of consequences, and that all England ran the risk of being damned for heresy, Esmond, for one, was perfectly willing to take his chance of the penalty along with the countless millions of his fellow-countrymen, who were bred in the same faith, and along with some of the noblest, the truest, the purest, the wisest, the most pious and learned men and women in the world." That there was bigotry and intolerance among the Protestants, however, as well as among the Catholics, Thackeray hints in the remark with which he closes the episode of

1. Esmond p. 163.
2. Esmond p. 277.

Esmond's saving the nun from the insults of an English sentinal₁. "Having been early taught a part of the Roman religion, he never had the horror of it that some Protestants have shown, and seem to think to be a part of ours."

Thackeray himself, as far as church membership was concerned, must have belonged to what is known as the High Church of England. Anthony Trollope, in speaking of Thackeray's great devotion to his mother, said₂, "There was, however, a discrepancy between them as to matters of religion. Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth was disposed to somewhat austere observance of the evangelical section of the Church. Such, certainly, never became the case with her son." If Thackeray did not agree with his mother's branch of the church, he found the methods of the Dissenting churches even more distasteful. In mentioning them, he does not seem able to keep out the note of ridicule. This is especially noticeable in his description of "the wealthy and religious and eminent -- Sophia Aletha Hobson₃," whom he makes us laugh at and respect at the same time. We are told that "her mansion at Clapham was long the resort of the most favored amongst the religious world₄. The most eloquent

1. Esmond p. 170.
2. Melville, Life of Thackeray, p. 18.
3. New. p. 14.
4. New. p. 14.

expounders, the most gifted missionaries, the most interesting converts from foreign islands, were to be found at her sumptuous table. "The servants of the household," on a Sunday", "marched away in separate couples or groups to at least half a dozen of religious edifices, each to sit under his or her favorite minister. The only man who went to Church was Thomas Newcome, accompanied by Tommy, his little son₁." But "Tommy was taught hymns very soon after he could speak, appropriate to his tender age, pointing out to him the inevitable fate of wicked children, and giving him the earliest possible warning and description of the punishment of little sinners." His stepmother's ministerial guests "took the little man between their knees and questioned him as to his right understanding of the place whither naughty boys were bound."

The daily occupation of the mistress of the mansion is thus described₂:- "To manage the great house of Hobson and Newcome; to attend to the interests of the enslaved negro; to awaken the benighted Hottentot to a sense of the truth; to convert Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Papists; to arouse the indifferent and often blasphemous mariner; to

1. New. p. 18.
2. New. p. 16,17

guide the washerwoman in the right way; to head all the public charities of her sect, and do a thousand secret kindnesses that none know of; (to answer myriads of letters, pension endless ministers, and supply their teeming wives with continuous baby-linen;) to hear preachers daily bawling for hours, and listen untired on her knees after a long day's labour, while florid rhapsodists belabored cushions above her with wearisome benedictions; all these things had this woman to do, and for near four-score years she fought her fight womanfully; imperious but deserving to rule, hard but doing her duty, severe but charitable, and untiring in generosity as in labor."

In "Vanity Fair" we have a more fanatical type of Dissenters, with characters far less admirable than that of Mrs. Newcome. Thackeray says of Lady Southdown¹, "At her own home -- this tall and awful missionary of the truth rode about the country, -- launched packets of tracts among the cottagers and tenants, and would order Gaffer Jones to be converted, as she would order Goody Hicks to take a James's powder, without appeal, resistance, or benefit of clergy--. Whatever charges her own belief might undergo (and it accommodated itself to a prodigious variety of opinion, taken from all sorts of doctors among the Dissenters) she had not

1. V.F. p. 318.

the least scruple in ordering all her tenants and inferiors to follow and believe after her." She "was for converting Miss Crawley offhand." However, when Pitt Crawley explained that by deluging Miss Crawley with tracts they might offend her, and thereby lose the chance of being favorably remembered in her will, Lady Southdown was immediately willing to forego the struggle of saving the sick lady's soul.

In "Pendennis", in the little village of Clavering, we have something of a comparison of the methods of work of the High Church with those of the Low Church and of the Dissenting body. The two latter are represented as being much more aggressive and successful in reaching the people, especially the factory people, with whom, Thackeray says¹, "Orthodoxy could make no way at all."

After all, however, Thackeray was not interested in creeds, but in the religion back of the creeds, the power that would help men and women to bear their misfortunes and to put down the wrong in their own lives and in the world about them.

1. Pen. p. 133.